

DEMYTHOLOGIZING THE POWER MYTH BY RE-CREATING

TRUTH IN ARAVIND ADIGA'S *THE WHITE TIGER*

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to explore the Dynamics of Power which are conversely used as a medium for Demythologizing the Power Myth by Re-Creating Truth in Aravind Adiga's *White Tiger*. The research aims to analyze power structure within both Indian rural and urban social order which contributes to destabilize the hierarchal order and subvert it. The objective of this paper is to highlight the agents of Power which counter the power myth of Indian society in particular and have the potential to restructure and demythologize the power myth as a parochial model by re-creating collective Truth. Aravind Adiga is a contemporary writer and his work has not been explored extensively. There is a gap in criticism with reference to power dynamics in contemporary Indian literature. This study aims to fill this gap.

Michel Foucault's work on Power and its implications on knowledge and re-creation of Truth are used as a tool. This research would open avenues for future researchers to locate power tools and ramifications of the reordering of power structure in the twenty first century rural and urban socio-economic landscape.

KEYWORDS: Indian Hierarchal Order, Power Dynamics, Socio-Economic Order

INTRODUCTION

Aravind Adiga in his novel *White Tiger* has reflected the life of the working class in India as a contrast to the lives of landlords empowered by the working class. The paradoxical lives constitute and compose the social structure of the Indian socio-political landscape demarcating further hierarchies. Historically, Indian population has been divided into castes for centuries. These divisions are a corollary of the Hindu caste system allocating designation and work according to the castes. The Hindus believe that the caste system developed owing to the differing color of skin of certain castes. The Aryans and Dasyus had a marked difference in their color of skin. Interestingly, the Sanskrit word '*varuna*' describes caste, however, it "means color" (SHHP 34).

The Hindu mythology is "created to explain", this difference. Accordingly, "a belief was developed that the Brahmins were born out of the mouth, the *Rajanyas* [*Kshatriyas*] out of the arms, the *Vishyas* out of the things and the *Shudras* out of the feet of Brahma, the Creator" (34). Keeping in view, this myth, power myths were created to reinforce the caste system as an integral part of the socio-political structure. These divisions are restructured in Adiga's fiction by relocating the space of the working class on the social order. This research aims to show how dynamics of power demythologize the Power Myth by re-creating Truth. The research aims to analyze power structure within both Indian rural and urban social order which contributes to destabilize the hierarchal order and subvert it. The objective of this paper is to

highlight the agents of Power which counter the power myth of Indian society in particular and have the potential to restructure and demythologize the power myth as a parochial model by re-creating collective Truth. Aravind Adiga is a contemporary writer and his work has not been explored extensively. There is a gap in criticism with reference to power dynamics in the contemporary Indian literature. This study aims to fill this gap.

In *White Tiger*, Adiga writes a letter to the Premier of China who is expected to arrive in India soon. In the letter he describes the conditions of the working class and admits that he murdered his Master to become rich by stealing his money used to bribe powerful politicians. Thus, the protagonist subverts and shifts power from Master to slave.

Adiga uses the epistolary style to personalize the issue while addressing it to an objective and neutral audience, the Chinese Premier, Mr. Jiabo. This allows Adiga to de-centralize power from the reader of the letter as anyone from India is bound to be connected to the center of power mechanisms pervading the Indian hierarchical order. This is a means of diffusing Power to the other. Power, according to Michel Foucault, “is diffuse rather than concentrated, embodied and enacted rather than possessed, discursive rather than purely coercive, and constitutes agents rather than being deployed by them” (Gaventa 1). Adiga has thus used his protagonist, Balram Halwai’s letter to the Premier of China as a medium of diffusion. However, there is no discursive narrative, the monologue encompasses the dialogue of the characters engaged to diffuse this power. Foucault “challenges the idea that power is wielded by people or groups by way of ‘episodic’ or ‘sovereign’ acts of domination or coercion, seeing it instead as dispersed and pervasive. ‘Power is everywhere’ and ‘comes from everywhere’ so in this sense is neither an agency nor a structure” (Foucault 63).

In *White Tiger*, Adiga deconstructs the multi-caste system and divides the Indian socio-political structure into merely two divisions, the Light and Darkness. Darkness is the source of power for the people in the Light. He cannot acquire and sustain power without the votes, as well as the determination of people of Darkness to remain in the Darkness. Balram, however, breaks free from the Darkness and restructures the power myth, allocating himself with Power. He re-inscribes the Truth of the social order by deconstructing the collective Truth of predestined caste superiority and power. In Foucault’s words this would be “a kind of ‘metapower’ or ‘regime of truth’ that pervades society, and which is in constant flux and negotiation” contrary to the fixed allocation of power”. Although, “‘power/knowledge’” “signify that power is constituted through accepted forms of knowledge, scientific understanding and truth” (Rainbow), Adiga shows how the tools of power are in a flux. From the beginning, he announces that he would be relaying “truth about Balram” (Adiga 6). However, he is presenting a monologue devoid of any one else’s voice to depict the Other’s perspective of truth. His truth is the only recourse to the knowledge of the reader. Thus, relocation of power to the protagonist who is from the working class is a means of diffusing the “norms” of “power/knowledge”. He deliberately demythologizes truth.

If myth is “primordial” (Norton1001) and has “archetypal” elements (Mattoon 39), then, Adiga deconstructs the archetype of myth and truth by relocation of power from the collective to the personal truth. According to Foucault, “Truth is a thing of the world: it is produced only virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its ‘general politics’ of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true” (Rainbow). These “regimes of truth” are “reinforced constantly through the education system, the media and the flux of political and economic ideologies” (Rainbow). So, Adiga shows the education system as well as the political system as a contributor of Power to the ruling landlords and politicians. His character, Balram however, shifts power from the center to the peripheral working class. He says, “Entrepreneurs are made from half-baked clay” (Adiga11).

He is half- baked “because” he is “never allowed to complete” his “schooling” (10). He further decentralizes the collective truth that the poor belong in the Rooster Coop.

The poor lie in this coop just like the hens and the roosters, “They see the organs of their brothers lying around them. They know they’re next. Yet they do not rebel. They do not try to get out of the coop” (173). The reason why the Coop remains intact and no one flees from this is that “The coop is guarded from inside” (194). The dynamics of Power work indigenously, from within. The “power-less” (186) remain so since “The desire to be a servant” is “bred” (193) into them. Another factor which further entraps the power-less Indian man in this coop is “The Indian family”, one is not “prepared to see family destroyed” but a white tiger can. He desires to leave the “cage” (177). Balram is considered a “Country- Mouse” to the society but he is a White Tiger who felt “Rage” (231) while stealing rather than “guilt” (231). In fact, he feels “The more I stole from him, the more I realized how much he had stolen from me I was growing a belly at last” (231), therefore, “I am my own master” (232). In this regard, “Foucault’s approach to power” can be used as a tool to understand Balram’s transformation from servant to master.

According to this approach, power “transcends politics and sees power as an everyday, socialized and embodied phenomenon” (Rainbow). Since, “power is a major source of social discipline and conformity”, “there is little scope for practical action the norms can be embedded as to be beyond our perception” (Rainbow). However, Balram, being a white tiger, bears two qualities which enable him to break the norm. He may not have the white skin, as apparently he is like half the men in India but inside he is a white tiger the “rarest thing in the jungle”. “White is the color of the master” (Adiga12), and tiger has power over the Stork, Mongoose, Raven, Buffalo and all the Country mice. Hence, he was more “ferocious” than the Storks and the Mongoose so he broke free from the coop. Like the white tiger in the zoo as opposed to the rarest thing in the jungle, the socio-political system had been “hypnotizing” him to stay cooped, as “that was the only way he could tolerate this cage” (276). Yet, he knew he “could not live the rest of” his “life in a cage” (276). He accepted the challenge to escape. So, to “challenge power is not a matter of seeking some ‘absolute truth’ [which is in any case a socially produced power], but ‘of detaching the power of truth from the forms of hegemony, social, economic, and cultural, within which it operates at the present time’” (Rainbow75). Balram detached himself from these forms of hegemony and established his own form. He used money to dictate the power of the police and the system, as he proclaims, “the moment you show cash, everyone knows your language” (298). The rich used cash to bribe and thus get richer and more powerful; the poor used cash to restructure the social order.

In *Power/ Knowledge*, Foucault claims, “it is a fact that we have repeatedly encountered, at least at a superficial level, an entire thematic to the effect that it is not theory but life that matters, not knowledge but reality, and above, and arising out of this thematic, there is something else to which we are witness, and which might describe as an insurrection of subjugated knowledge” (81). By subjugated knowledge, Foucault means, “historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence of formal systemization” and “disqualified knowledge located low down on the hierarchy”. He asks for “re-emergence of these low-ranking knowledge a differential knowledge incapable of unanimity” (81-82). Balram Halwai defied his Halwai caste and chose to shed his allocated role of the Country-Mouse to re-appropriate his human Self by stepping into the skin of a white tiger. In his case, he is rare as he has acquired knowledge from the streets and the tea stall rather than from the depleted education system. Balram proclaims, “I am a man of action” (Adiga12), so he does not allow predestined subjugation to the norm of the society. He knows that differences do not arise due to cast, color or creed. The difference lies in the greed for power. He says, “Those that were the most ferocious, the

hungriest, had eaten everyone else up and grown big bellies. That was all that counted now, the size of your belly. It didn't matter whether you were a woman, or a Muslim, or an untouchable; anyone with a belly could rise up" (64).

Balram demythologizes the power myth embedded in creed and caste as bred by knowledge. According to him, "in the old days there were thousands of castes and destinies in India. These days, there are men with Big Bellies and men with Small Bellies (Adiga64). It is the size of the greed for power that determines the position on the hierarchal order. Even among the servants there is a hierarchy which Balram destabilizes. He becomes servant number one by blackmailing the Nepali servant. Vijay, a pigherd's son rose from a bus conductor to a respected politician. Balram sees a "landlord bowing before a pigherd's son! The marvel of democracy" (103), thus, he knows that power is flux and "comes from everywhere". The myth has been created by the "subjugated knowledge" which is transferred to the common man. Balram recognizes this knowledge, "A handful of men in this country have trained the remaining ninety nine percent as string, as talented, as intelligent in every way- to exist in perpetual servitude; servitude so strong that you can put the key of his emancipation in a man's hand and he will throw it back at you with a curse?" (175-76). However, Aravind presents a character which deciphers the subjugation mechanism and demythologizes the myth created through the collective truth of the rich remaining rich and the poor remaining trapped in the Rooster Coop.

He restructures the socio-political order by realizing "I was looking for the keys / But the door was always open" (272). He bends the law to his advantage as well as to free others from the coop. He helps the driver that hit the boy on the bicycle and he knows that he can help the family of the boy by the power he owns, which is through cash as "everyone knows your language" if you have cash (298). He deconstructs the "illegitimate knowledges against the claim of unitary body of theory which would filter, heirarchise and order them in the name of some true knowledge and some arbitrary idea of what constitutes science and its objects" (Foucault *Power/ Knowledge* 83). Balram Halwai claims to make "A school where you won't be allowed to corrupt anyone's head with prayers and stories about God or Gandhi- nothing but the facts of life for these kids. A school full of White Tigers, unleashed on Bangalore! We'd have this city at our knees, I tell you" (319). Thus, he has planned and plans further to restructure the Power myth in the hierarchal model of socio-economic landscape.

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